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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the book "Sociology of Education" (Browne and Foster, editors). The paper begins with the observation that the study of the sociology of education is an important part of teacher training, but is often forgotten after graduation in the first year of classroom experience. Problems which impede the incorporation of educational sociology into teacher preparation and development are sketched, after which the book is reviewed under the heading of: (1) effects of education; (2) the role of sociology of education; (3) limitations of conservative sociology; (4) status equality in the "old" sociology of education; (5) the transition from "old" to "new" sociology; (6) problems of the "new" sociology of education; (7) policy implications; (8) the need for a theory of education; (9) public and private schooling; and (10) sexism in education. The review also examines areas in this field which are not covered in the book. (CB)

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BROWNE AND FOSTER'S 'SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION'

The study of the sociology of education is an important part of teacher training, but is often forgotten after graduation in the reality shock of the first year classroom experience.

Why is sociology so easily put aside? Potentially, it is central to teacher practice because it provides the opportunity to locate the individual teacher experience in the context of the broader social forces that determine schooling. It should enable us to understand the potential of teaching and learning in different types of school, and where to reform the system of schooling as a whole. Sociological analysis should be an important tool available to all teacher unionists, indeed, most union practice is based on sociological assumptions of one sort or another, even if these are not recognised as such.

That the sociology of education does not function as a useful discipline for many teachers derives from weaknesses in the discipline itself. Sociology's relevance to teaching practice is not clear. Sociology has borrowed extensively from elsewhere - political science, history, economics and measurement-based psychology - and has yet to thoroughly establish itself as a distinct discipline. More importantly, sociology has failed to conclusively answer the key questions it has posed.

What are the effects of education?

For example, the sociology of education has no definitive answer to the central questions about the effects of education, at both an individual and a social level. How do people learn? What are the social obstacles

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to the broader development of learning and creativity? Can greater equality be achieved through educational reform? To what extent can schooling change society? What are the outputs of the educational process? What are we seeking to achieve through education?

Sociology is also deeply ambivalent about its own methods of analysis and synthesis. To what extent can quantitative measuring techniques (borrowed from the physical sciences via psychology) be applied to such elusive phenomena as the development of skills, cognitive thought, knowledge and creativity through education? Can the output of education be measured? Can such measurements help us to improve the results of schooling? To improve the work of teachers?

Are qualitative changes in schooling - processes, classroom organisation, administration - more important than quantitative (resource) changes as the Schools Commission now claims?[1] What is the relationship between quantitative resource inputs, and qualitative changes to the processes of education?

Like economists, sociologists provide a myriad of competing and contradictory answers to the central questions of their discipline.

The role of sociology of education

Like economists also, sociologists must make governing political assumptions about contemporary Australian society and about the role of sociology within it. For example, the editors of Sociology of Education (one of whom is Secretary to the Australian Education Council of education ministers) propound the classic conservative view:

> "By its very nature, the discipline of sociology has as a central concern how a society maintains order in the face of continuing conflict and change. The institution of education is one of the mechanisms for achieving order" (Page 393).[2]

While such a doctrine may appeal to the teacher who has long ago made classroom control the number one and overriding priority, it is of little value to the teacher whose primary aim is to maximise the potential

and the achievement of her/his students, and it is of no value to the would-be education reformer who takes a critical view of both schooling and society.

Fortunately many of the 43 contributors to Browne and Fosters' book take a different view to that of the editors. Professor Richard Bates' arresting essay finds that conservative sociology is a part of the apparatus of "technical rationality"; it is a control mechanism intended to further the interests of bureaucratic administrations:

> "Sociological research is appealed to in order to facilitate the socialization of teachers and pupils into the workplace of the classroom. Such administrative treatment defines teaching as a technical process in which the major considerations are not content, volition and justification, but efficiency, effectiveness and communicability" (Page 79).

And Fiona Mackie takes this theme a stage further in her perceptive and compact critique of classroom processes. Not only do a conservative sociology and the corresponding authoritarian pedagogy serve as instruments of control in the classroom and in the schooling system, one effect of the process of control is the repression of the student's capacity to understand her/his own social situation, ie. the student's capacity to arrive at a "sociological view":

> "Attention, and slowly the whole perception, is weaned away from the whole group experience. Only the teacher defines and controls its structure. The 'good' child becomes increasingly blind to the overall context and by the simultaneous removal of the concern for others ('mind your own business', 'I'll decide what's good for Rita') becomes blind, also, to its inherent injustices. The constantly-circulating labels of 'good', 'bad', 'clever' and 'stupid' function to isolate potential leaders of the child group. In each child, and in the simultaneous structuring of the group, co-operative praxis and the articulation of shared interests, as well as a sociological view, awareness of the mechanisms of group construction are discouraged by many interlocking pressures. ... One is habituated to accept group structure as imposed; to locate oneself as an individual in

the framework of its structure and to focus on the demands of external authority. This represents a training towards a selective unconsciousness." (Page 320).

Bates and Mackie, and other contributors such as Young, Stockley, Nash, Presdee, Harker, Watkins, Ashenden/Connell, Dowsett/Kessler, Samuel, Nicholls/Preston and Pusey pursue a critical approach to both the discipline of sociology and to the social realities they address. On the whole, the critical thinkers have produced the deepest insights in Sociology of Education, if often the more challenging and difficult to grasp. While they do not solve the basic uncertainties of the discipline they have at least tended to pose many of the right questions.

Limitations of conservative sociology

The problems of sociology of education are most obvious amongst the conservative thinkers. The unfortunate chapter by Trevor Williams of the Australian Council for Educational Research, 'Staying and leaving' exemplifies this.

Williams sets out to "examine some of the causes of achievement in school and of early school leaving". In true ACER fashion achievement in school is measured by performance in basic skills tests, a test which favours students from more affluent families. Through "a system of structural equations", which are claimed to make it possible to isolate the effects of particular variables, Williams aims to 'measure' the effect of each of these variables on 'school achievement'. Naturally the various variables concerned - school type, socio-economic background, migrancy, etc. - are not comprehensive, tend to overlap with each other and are also closely interrelated, so that attempting to isolate them from each other is an arbitrary and fallacious exercise.

The results are predictable because the assumptions used in the equations are conservative. Williams steams ahead, concluding that private school students do better than government school students even when the socio-economic factor is 'constant', while overlooking the selective nature of private school populations, and decides that a return to rote learning would increase participation in education (!):

"Students with less conceptual capability cannot easily handle the predominantly cognitive mode of instruction and its substance, do not do well by the standards applied, are not rewarded and see little point in continuing in an institution which promises more of the same ... when properly designed and implemented, methods that encourage learning by repetition need not be boring or otherwise unpleasant ... Meaningful repetition in situations where the practical application of the learning is apparent and, in fact, is the substance and method of the learning may provide for those 20 per cent of youth who fail to master basic skills in Literacy and Numeracy before leaving school. 'Understanding' in an abstract, verbal, cognitive sense need not be a prerequisite for the learning of basic skills. It should be for those that are cognitively capable, but there are other ways for those who are not as capable. In short we are arguing for an instructional pluralism which recognises that different aptitudes require different treatments to ensure that all individuals develop the competencies needed to function effectively." (Pages 259 and 260).

William's approach is an example of the scientism criticised effectively by Michael Pusey (page 405). Measurement theorists such as Williams use systems of quantification that have no consistent objective foundation - such as reliance on test results, the use of regression analysis in identifying separate 'quantities' that in reality are part of an indivisible whole, the reduction of complex processes to single numbers on a linear scale, and the numerical weighting of the 'intensity' of opinions on the basis of the results of attitudinal questionnaires.

Buried in their methodology, such systems of quantification conceal arbitrary (and in the case of Williams, conservative) educational assumptions. For example, the use of test scores to measure student 'achievement' assumes that a single score covering a narrow range of functions can meaningfully record the effects of schooling, a student's general capacity and potential to learn and to solve problems in the future, and the relative success of the teaching process in the past. More nonsensically, score-based achievement measures assume that the

arithmetical relationship between two student's test scores is a precise representation of the differences in 'achievement'.

As students from more affluent backgrounds consistantly score more successfully on test-based measures, the use of test scores reinforces and reproduces the privileges already enjoyed by those students, by representing them as 'higher achievers'. Then the measurement of 'higher achievement' through tests and exam results becomes represented as an objective basis for selection for further education opportunities on the assumption that all students entered the testing process with equal opportunity to succeed.

Hence scientism provides a 'scientific' and apparently value-free representation of social realities that are both too complex and elusive for quantification by present tools of measurement, and involve choices about important value judgements - choices that are hidden and repressed by the techniques that are used.

Through the testing process social policy prejudices become represented as scientific 'facts'; and in turn, these 'facts' are used in their real role as social prejudices. As Don Novick describes it:

> "Schooling is so riddled with right and wrong that arithmetic scores assume the weight of moral judgement" (Page 351).

Abstraction is necessary in the scientific process but in scientism, the abstract loses all contact with the concrete reality. Scientism is about administration and politics rather than science; its primary role is to maintain conventional authority in education and to reinforce the status quo. The abandonment of scientism is a necessary part of any effort to understand and to improve education.

It is also necessary to any sociologists' efforts to produce findings of value to the classroom teacher. Williams has completely lost contact with the tasks of the teacher. In a classroom it is simply not possible to separate understanding from learning as he suggests, least of all as a method of making education more attractive.

Status equality in the 'old' sociology of education

As well as being conservatives and radicals, education sociologists can be 'old' or 'new'. These labels refer to major stages in the development of the sociology of education and cut across the conservative/radical division to some extent.

The traditional concern of the old sociology was with status equality. Williams is a typical old sociologist where he says:

> "The unifying concern of the overall project is with social processes implicated in status attainment, both educational and occupational ... Status attainment models have their origins in the study of social mobility and, over the past fifteen years, have derived much of their structure and impetus from the concern that societies provide equality of opportunity for their members." (Page 249).

All sociologists are in some sense concerned about social equality. For some equality is a goal to be pursued for its own sake, involving confrontation and social change. But for the 'old' sociologists, as the authors of Unpopular Education note, seemingly echoing Williams:

> "... the old sociology has never been concerned with a politics of class, but always with a politics of status ... the concerns have been with equality of opportunity and more social mobility and, beyond that, with a lessening of social divisions, an evening of conspicious status divisions and a greater social unity on the basis of 'fraternity' or 'citizenship' ... equality becomes, in these analyses, less of an end in itself and more a means to social order or cohesion, while fundamental social relations remain unmodified."[3]

Even when the old sociology of education posed the right questions or formulated the appropriate hypotheses, its scientistic methods (operating in a manner that was both arbitrary and conservatising) prevented it from arriving at useful information for the practising teacher and the education policy maker:

"... research was committed to the twin hypotheses that educational outcomes were much influenced by the social and cultural background of school students and by the detailed character of school organisation and selection. It was on this 'qualitative' ground that 'sociography' began to fail, for it required an understanding of experience and of cultural process, for the investigation of which the 'adminstered' questionnaire, the random sample and the extensive survey were very blunt instruments indeed ... complex attitudes are boiled down to points on a scale, ripped out of the context of surrounding beliefs and rendered trivial by divorcing them from the experiential conditions within which they make sense."[4]

And a generation of policies based on the advice of 'old' sociologists (whatever their political persuasion) have failed to deliver greater equality of opportunity.

From old to new sociology

Many of the book's chapters are influenced by what has been described as the "new sociology of education". Although the new sociology of education owes its origins to radical thinkers such as Bernstein and Bourdieu (both of whom are summarised several times in Sociology of Education), some of the tenets and emphases of the new school of thought have also been influential amongst conservatives.

Browne describes the "new sociology of education" as an attempt to completely rewrite the traditional sociological agenda:

"With this new direction, emphasis shifted from structural issues such as access to education and the impact of social class background on the type and length of children's education to the nature of schooling and the curriculum to which students are exposed ... this was related to a ferment within the discipline of sociology itself with the resurgence of interest in symbolic interactionism and neo-Marxist thought. It was also related to a growing disillusionment in the capacity of education to change society" (Pages 395 and 396).

But is the 'new sociology' quite such a total break from the reform concerns of the past? That depends on your political vantage point. The 'new sociology of education' has certainly shifted focus to the classroom. It emphasises the nature of knowledge, the construction of the curriculum, forms of interaction and control in the classroom and the structuring of consciousness. Amongst radical thinkers these concerns intersect with the reproductionist (Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, etc.) theories of schooling as a mechanism for reproducing existing social inequalities and the maintenance of patterns of dominance and subordination.

Issues of equality and access remain relevant in this world view. The work of the Melbourne University Sociology Research Group - not represented in Browne and Fosters' volume - combine the old reform concerns with the new insights in an impressive manner. But the conservative new sociologist ignores this critical social dimension.

At its best the 'new sociology of education' produces uncanny insights into the interaction between system, teacher and students and these insights are the highlight of Sociology of Education, for example the work of Young and Mackie. In turn this material is particularly useful for trainee teachers. For example, Young describes how traditional patterns of authority in the classroom tend to suppress the acquisition of cognitive skills (Williams should take note):

> "... more than seventy years of classroom observational research has clearly and consistently shown that there is a single, dominant pattern of classroom communication ... We are only now beginning to understand the social significance of this pattern...
>
> "What we observe, then, in the classroom communication process, in turn-taking rules, teacher control of questions, teacher evaluation and reformulation of pupil responses, and in general teacher dominance of classroom talk (75% of total talk), is a conflation of control and content.

"Higher order cognitive skills (eg. synthesis, analysis, criticism) are not encouraged through promotion of active pupil practice of them. Rather the teacher, primarily in reformulating, does the work of generalisation, specification, increasing precision, testing hypotheses and the like.

"... teachers do most of the higher order cognitive work and they do it implicitly rather than explicitly.

"... the control process distorts the cognitive process, reducing opportunities to practise higher-order cognitive skills in particular, and also, generally, reducing the chance that pupils will be likely to learn to value their own discourse" (Pages 165-170).

Problems of the 'new sociology of education'

But the 'new sociology of education' has weaknesses common to all its variants, most obvious in the case of its conservative proponents.

Firstly, it has not solved the problem of measurement in education, particularly measurement of output and measurement of multi-variable processes. There is no adequate science of education; scientism reigns by default although rejected by many educational sociologists.

Secondly, it is prone to a certain disabling scepticism. Starting from the important insight that the construction of knowledge reflects social interests and values, a too exclusively abstract reading of the tasks of sociology can lead to a tendency to see all knowledge, all values and ultimately all representations of reality as of equal validity and equal weight. This extreme relativism is expressed in the chapter on therapy by L E Foster and A J Williams. They extol the subjective, deny the existence of objective reality (which is equated with traditional authority!) and characterise the task of the therapist/teacher as emotional manipulation:

"The chief lesson given to clients is that they must find their own meanings within themselves ... during the therapy hour no reality is more important than the phenomenal reality as it appears to the client: the client's emotional

reactions to events are precisely what is being elicited. The fixed character-type prevalent in the external, more 'authoritarian' society is exchanged for a notion of the self as a series of experiments; consistency in perception is not necessary, 'intellectualism' is prohibited ... increasing numbers of people in the community share a privatised moral vision of self ..." (Pages 216 to 218).

Thirdly, the 'new sociology of education' is subject to a high degree of school-centrism: an overwhelming tendency to focus on the individual school at the expense of a wider social view.

Finally, it tends towards pessimism about political change and produces relatively few useful policy proposals.

The methodological emphases of the 'new sociology' are on events within the school. These emphases can easily lead to an analytical and political fixation on the school dimension, while ignoring the social dimension altogether.

There is an odd convergence between radical and conservative sociologists here. The radicals tend to be influenced by a determinist reading of social reproduction, so that society is seen as impossible to change short of a social revolution, and hence beyond influence - at least from the education sector. The social dimension is therefore regarded as given for analytical purposes. However, rather than do nothing in the classroom because it is 'all determined', radical sociologists (and teachers) have a natural occupational tendency to concentrate on work in the classroom because as Ashenden et al note:

"It at least gives them something to do" (Page 234).

The conservative also sees the existing social situation as inevitable, while regarding it as desirable and unquestionable as well. In the conservative world view fixation on the school level then becomes a matter of propriety and duty as well as good pragmatics. The concept of duty tends towards the absolute, and so duty can be infinitely increased - the teacher can always do better than before.

School-centrism and pessimism are associated with Browne's assumption that political efforts to create greater social and educational equality are doomed to fail, and also with the downgrading of the importance of material inputs (eg. more teachers and smaller class sizes) in improving education. For the conservative 'new sociologist' the resulting tenets are quite paradoxical, although necessary to each other. On one hand systemic reform is futile but on the other, the possibilities for school-based improvements are infinite. This is the ultimate expression of a school-centric world view.

Hence the stress on "effective schools" research in the most recent Schools Commission discussion of the issues. Ignoring the fact that the same system produces both good and bad outcomes, that "it succeeds for the same reason that it fails" (Don Novick, Page 354), the Commission suggests that reforms to the processes of schooling such as the selective use of small groupings, greater commitment by teachers and more leadership by principals should take priority over improved overall material inputs to schooling. The Commission cynically notes that an emphasis on quality issues rather than quantity issues is "politically attractive" because it "carries no direct implications for additional resources."[5]

Policy implications

For some radical new sociologists the policy implications of school-centrism and pessimism are in the absence of concrete systemic policy proposals. For example, these tenets lead to an implicit or explicit acceptance of the belief that educational reform cannot create greater equality. If you accept Bernstein's premise that systemic reforms in schooling have a tendency to benefit middle-class children to the exclusion of the needs of working class children, logical responses are either no policy, utopian visions, or a retreat into small-scale improvement of the situation of particular individuals, a set of political alternatives that is almost counter-cultural by nature. There are few practical proposals spelt out in the radical 'new sociologist' chapters of Sociology of Education and none provide us with a political manifesto or a shopping list of tasks, which would have been useful.

The conservative 'new sociologist' shares the focus on the classroom but is not interested in critique. Rather, the conservative has practical ends in view-effective socialisation, basic skills, improved output. Hence for the conservative the policy implications of school-centrism and pessimism about systemic reform are quite different: systemic exhortation to school improvement.

This represents a shift of the basic political responsbilities from the Government and Education Department to the school and perhaps, the school community (incidentally, a transfer consistent with the privatisation of education and its attendant market ideology). This shift carries grave dangers of increased pressure on schools and teachers.

Thus the extravagant claims of the human capital theorists of the 1960s about the supposed direct economic and social benefits of increased investment in education (claims formulated by 'old sociologists' such as the British John Vaizey) come to be replaced by the equally extravagant and misleading claims of the conservative 'new sociologists' who argue that qualitative changes to the processes of schooling are the be-all and end-all of educational reform. A one-sided stress on reforms to the processes within the school can lead to as many unreal and unfulfillable expectations about what schools can do as did the old human capital theory, but this time the accountability burdens largely fall directly on the teacher.

Ironically, qualitative improvement is rendered harder to achieve by this approach. Quantitative changes, such as more teachers, release resources that can be used to pursue a greater specialisation and a more efficient division of labour, as well as more time for planning. There is a limit to the qualitative changes that can be achieved without quantitative changes taking place as well.

The need for a theory of education

Thus the problem of the 'old sociology of education' have not been solved; they have only been displaced or compounded by the problems of the 'new sociology'. As Bates says, the 'new sociology' is yet to produce a coherent new theory of schooling which would effectively link the macro-social level to the micro-world of the classroom:

"Education is increasingly recognised as a system of cultural transmission and reproduction which serves to simultaneously maintain, disguise and legitimate the interests of particular groups within the social system ... As yet, however, studies tend to focus either on an over-determined view of the relations between schooling and economic structure or on a limited account of teacher/pupil transactions.

"What is missing is any thorough analysis of the processes and structures through which the wider social relations of production and control are articulated with classroom practice."

Such a theory would establish 'laws of motion' of education within society as a whole. It would therefore be a theory of education in the context of a broader social theory, rather than a completely discrete discipline. It would trace the patterns of determination between society and education, and identify the key variables and processes (both inside and outside the formal structures of education) that are able to act as catalysts of change in both the internal workings of schooling and in the social role of schools.

Such a theory would not adopt a determinist pessimistic outlook and thereby forsake its practical political task of formulating both educational policies, and strategies for change.

The construction of such a theory requires breaking the bounds of traditional sociology to incorporate the broader social theory and to adopt rigorous scientific principles. The work of Dr Richard Teese at Melbourne University indicates promising lines of approach.[6]

Such a theory necessitates recognition of the following elements:

. Educational change is necessary but not in itself sufficient to produce social outcomes such as improved productivity, greater equality, increased literacy or more widespread creativity. Other social institutions must change also.

. The relative autonomy of the education sector, including its physical autonomy, does allow some such social changes to be

initiated there and to be transmitted to other social institutions. (This scope for initiative also has limits, which vary historically and are as yet undefined.)

. To achieve deeprooted changes in schooling, both society and schooling must alter. But a change in one does create more favourable conditions for a change (positive or negative) in the other.

. Schooling is a product of society but it cannot be simply reduced to society, either in theory or practice. While the evolution of society sets boundaries on the possible histories of schooling, all major social institutions (and there are at least four institutions of schooling - government systems, independent elite private schools, Catholic schools and small new private schools) have their own autonomy and their own internal laws of motion as well as being subject to the external laws of motion of society as a whole.

. The role of education is much broader than is the role of formal schooling. Watkins quotes Gramsci's statement that: "every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship" (Page 198).

The dogmas of an 'old' or a 'new' sociology of education are no substitute for the painstaking and lengthy process of the detailed construction of this theory and the development of its practical implications. This theory is needed by teachers as much as it is needed by sociologists.

It is a basic weakness of Sociology of Education that it fails to focus clearly on the central weaknesses in and absences from the discipline, and thereby clarify the difficult tasks ahead of both sociologist and teacher.

If teacher training textbooks would honestly address the need for adequate theory, then perhaps some of the teachers of the future could themselves more effectively contribute to the advancement of knowledge about their own field of work. Such contributions would achieve their greatest educational and political weight through a collective process within the teacher unions. A widespread teacher consciousness of sociological issues could then contribute to general improvements in the processes of education.

Public and private schooling

There are only two chapters in Sociology of Education on the dual system of education and the competition between the public and private sectors, probably the most important issue facing schooling in Australia, but these chapters are useful.

Helen Praetz's contribution on 'the non-government schools' analyses some of the dynamics of the recent surge of growth in that sector. Stating that "this new flowering of the non-government schools is largely attributable to recent changes in public policy" (Page 35) she itemizes the role of government grants and the Karmel-established systemic organisation in the recovery and the expansion of Catholic schools. Praetz notes that "despite their increasing dependence on governments, non-government schools have remained largely free of government regulation" (Page 43) and stresses the determination of private school authorities to preserve their autonomy.

Praetz throws new light on the reasons for the replacement of members of religious orders by government-funded lay teachers in Catholic schools, a large-scale phenomenon of the last decade that has greatly increased the funding of Catholic schools. It is generally assumed that the decline in "contributed services" from the religious orders is primarily due to the fall in the number of people entering those orders, but Praetz explains that a more important factor was the deliberate decision by the Catholic authorities to redeploy members of religious orders into non-educational work (Page 39).

Her contribution is also one of the first to acknowledge that the increasing social role of the private schools is undermining the comprehensive government school system:

> "... choice of school is severely hampered by capacity to pay, and thus for many, choice is illusory ... while government funding has increased parental choice, the social importance of the common school has been devalued ... Perhaps the time has now come to reject policies directed at increasing parental choice in favour of policies which enhance children's rights to attend schools which affirm and reflect societal pluralism" (Page 44).

Michael Norman is the voice of 'the new schools movement'. There was a 41 per cent growth between 1978 and 1982 in the number of private schools that were neither Catholic nor Anglican, many of them small religious schools such as the Accelerated Christian Education chain and others organised by middle-class parents influenced by counter-cultural or radical educational ideas. These schools all share an orientation to community schooling and homogeneity of values. Norman implies that the decision to found such a school should be given even more government support than it has been given in recent years. He finishes on a series of rhetorical questions that are a chilling (although unintended) illustration of the effects of the doctrine of 'freedom of choice':

> "If any school within the State system becomes too unresponsive to public needs and expectations that it loses numbers or its catchment population dwindles, will it become available for lease or purchase to any interest group that can prove its need of the school? If not, why not?" (Page 445)

Contributions by Hewitson, Nash, Presdee, Bates, Ashenden et al, Pusey and others throw some light on the standards debate. A common implicit theme is that the concepts of educational standards and accountability are historically relative; they do not have an objective foundation as such but derive from the social and political demands made on the educational system, and these demands vary over time.

The standards debate is thus a debate about perception rather than about measurement. It is about "the extent to which the aims and objectives of schooling are perceived to be not attained," and "the views which people have on what 'the proper business of schools' are mainly matters of belief or faith, not empirically or logically established fact" (Mai Hewitson, Pages 97 and 98), although they may often invoke scientism to 'prove' their case.

The standards issue is really a cloak for other debates - curriculum, decision making, private/public, industrial relations in teaching. The conservative line on standards (not represented in Sociology of Education) requires a control-based pedagogy with a strong emphasis on measurement and selection, to enable the definition and demonstration

of 'standards'. Thus standards is a very useful issue for the political right and will not go away. The problems of schools in this regard are compounded by renewed tendencies to bureaucratic control because "demands for accountability within hyper-rationalised systems cannot be met". (Richard Bates, Page 80)

Assessment, streaming and life chances

Competition in schooling is an important underlying theme in several chapters. As Rosemarie Otto points out:

> "The demand for competition between individuals and the discouragement of learning as a co-operative effort, the benefits of which are to be shared, implies mutual estrangement and is another important factor in the reproduction of an alienated workforce and the cultural values required to maintain it." (Page 142)

Fiona Mackie sees the "construction of the atomised individual identity, cut off from the group" as perhaps the crucial distortion engendered by schooling, and she observes this occurring in both working class and middle class schooling, and through both visible pedagogies and invisible pedagogies:

> "In spite of different methods, the child is constituted in the form of which is perhaps the ultimate private property and the ultimate consequence of fetishism. Consciousness itself is constituted as the private property of the atomised individual: 'my' consciousness fragmented from and in constant competition with 'yours'". (Page 321)

How can the competitive mode be transcended in a society which demands competition, selection and the privatisation of knowledge through schooling? J Maddock notes that:

> "Many high schools have moved away from streaming and tracking, which imply allocation, towards a subject choice system in which pupils gravitate towards classes and teaching groups with varying curricular contents". (Page 293)

This process has its limits. Students tend to stream themselves through subject choices, and the staff still shape the choices through the definition of the alternatives and the shaping of students' views of themselves. (Page 295) As Otto's sensitive description of the dilemmas of alternative education shows, it is extremely difficult to establish a radically different single-school ethos within an unchanged schooling system and an unsympathetic society. An essential precondition of lasting changes at the individual school level is therefore systemic change, especially at the key points of competition and selection where schooling intersects with society, such as certification and entry into higher education.

The role of credentials is a contradictory one. While credentials that differentiate between students by grading them in a vertical hierarchy act as a structural mechanism for reproducing inequalities, directly turning 'failure' at school into failure in life, credentials of a non-discriminatory, general nature are a necessary part of the broadening of access to education.

However, neither changes to credentials nor the inculcation of specific attitudes to work can in themselves provide greater equality in access to job opportunities; major social changes are required, including the elimination of unemployment. In the absence of such changes the work experience programmes discussed by Michael Presdee and Peter Watkins serve as mechanisms for displacing social and economic responsibilities onto the schools and the individual students:

> "... it is quite clear that education is unable to comprehend the true nature of unemployment. It can ultimately only educate for unemployment rather than against and about unemployment. The strategies for action can only be directed inwards, into the student, in order to produce an outward veneer of benign acceptance of the present crisis confronting capitalism which is portrayed as being altogether inevitable" (Presdee, Page 134)

As a result there is "a frightening inability by teachers to do anything but plead for the recognition of the link between education and employment without being able to ensure the success of their students"

and to "create in students a feeling of hope that somehow, at some time, the script will get better". (Pages 136 and 137)

Linley Samuel's sympathetic study of working class school resistance shows that this does not satisfy many of the students. She challenges Paul Willis' 1977 thesis that the oppositional cultural solidarity of working class students leads to their failure at school:

> "These girls have been labelled as failures by the school even though they are girls who place a high value on educational success and have a fairly positive attitude towards the school curriculum. They are currently in the process of being excluded from any further education ... Why is it that these girls, who on the whole want badly to succeed and are by no means unintelligent, come to be seen as uneducable?" (Page 367)

Presences and absences

The editors have chosen a short contribution format with chapters averaging out at ten pages. This works very well. It has enabled them to produce easily digestible material on a wide range of themes. Topics such as multicultural education, Aboriginal education, rural education and the labour market are covered from more than one vantage point.

There are some surprising absences though. The book misses some of the most important historical developments in schooling, issues that will significantly affect the working lives of most of the trainee teachers who use Sociology of Education. There is no mention of the role of television and other educational mechanisms outside schooling. The development of private video cassettes and home computer technology, and their implications for the social distribution of educational resources, the privatisation of knowledge and the very future of schooling - witness the home-school movement in the USA - has been missed. Only Richard Bates refers to the potential of technological curriculum packaging to completely transform the role of the teacher.

Teacher shortages are a growing problem in secondary systems and will affect all schools by the end of the decade, but the politics of teacher supply and demand has been overlooked. Remarkably, reference to Technical and Further Education has been completely omitted although many of today's trainees will teach in that system. There is little on higher education apart from Barbara Preston and Jane Nicholl's perceptive outline of its funding problems under Fraser in 'higher education in decline'.

No information is provided on childcare and its interface with pre-school education. The broader dimension of the family and its relationship to schooling has been missed, a further indication of the school-centrism of sociological analysis. Secondary education is much more strongly represented than primary education, a perpetual problem in teacher education texts which are often written by academics with extensive secondary experience but little or no professional contact with the primary years. This reinforces the tendency, obvious in education funding and education politics in Australia, to neglect the primary schools. It is also one of the factors that makes primary teaching a less desired career location.

The politics of education is also underplayed. Some useful insights are provided in Michael Pusey's forecast of increasing pressures on schooling and David Stockley's account of the shifts in Schools Commission policies under the Liberal/National Party Governments of 1976 to 1981. The role of Education Departments and the private school authorities has been missed.

It is disappointing that there is no description of the evolution of ALP education policy, as the editors just had time to rectify the omission between Mr Hawke's victory in March 1983 and the publication of Sociology of Education at the end of the year. The book is certainly limited by its genesis towards the end of the Fraser years; this could hardly have been avoided but it necessitates a fourth edition perhaps quicker than it would have been otherwise scheduled, to incorporate such themes as participation, retention, labour power planning and the renewed debate about access to higher education.

The absence of information on teacher organisations and their industrial and educational impact is reprehensible, although not altogether surprising as the teaching profession as such is not closely analysed. Teacher unions have been centrally involved in, or the subject of, most educational controversy in the last decade and a half. They have played a major part in the shaping of education policies and have taken educational issues into the electoral arena with some success; they will also be important in the future professional life of many teacher trainees.

Only the valuable chapter by Cath Blakers ('Having a say: Parent participation in decision-making') addresses the role of parent organisations in the politics of education and there is little on the influential private school lobbies and community organisations. The editors could not have provided separate chapters on all of these themes, but further general chapters on the politics of education would have been well used.

Sexism in education

Sexism in education is analysed specifically in two chapters, by Sue Middleton and S N Sampson. Sampson looks at the way in which the promotional criteria of the teaching service, such as the requirement of unbroken service, has discriminated against the accession of women to school leadership positions. In turn the promotional structure means that equal pay has not really been achieved. Although in the late 1960s, most of the old formal barriers to women (such as non-permanence after marriage) had been removed:

> "In NSW, in 1979, the Anti-Discrimination Board undertook a study of the secondary teaching service. It found that in 1949, 20.9 per cent of principals and 25.4 per cent deputy principals were women, whereas in 1979 only 9.6 per cent principals and 7.1 per cent deputies were". (Page 417)

Sampson points out that a National Union of Teachers (UK) 1978 study found that over 30 per cent of women teachers were earning not the second family wage, but the first. She calls on teachers to "press for a promotion system which is flexible enough to take account of

the varied ways in which women order their lives, and which considers them, not on the basis of their maternal capacity, or their marital status, but solely as teachers and administrators on the basis of professional competence alone." (Page 423)

Other themes

Although Sociology of Education is sub-titled "Australian and New Zealand Studies" there is little written specifically from a New Zealand vantage point - only four chapters (Boag, Nash, Harker and Middleton) out of 43 all told. No material comparing Australian and New Zealand education has been included; this would have been a useful assistance to New Zealand trainees in sifting the rest of the book.

Migrant and multicultural education is well treated, with Frank Lewins on ethnic schools, Lois Foster's account of the evolution of multicultural education policy under Fraser and J J Smolicz's valuable chapter on forms of multiculturalism. He is scathing about the policy view that sees multiculturalism as a temporary expedient and a prelude to assimilation, stressing the need for multicultural education to be a reality for all students, not just those from non-Anglo backgrounds:

> "Schools must take up this challenge since, in the present climate of the renaissance of ethnic identity, if they fail to do so, the vaccuum will be filled by ethnic separatist institutions." (Page 22)

Smolicz is less critical than he might have been of the slowness of government schools to respond to multiculturalism and to the need for bilingual programmes.

Rural education is the subject of two rather pedestrian chapters and a greater emphasis on Aboriginal education would have been desirable. In discussing Aboriginal studies Don Williams raises the contradiction between a subject-based syllabus and "the relatively integrated nature of all aspects of Aboriginal life" (Page 208), pointing to the need for an inter-disciplinary approach - a theme that could have been usefully canvassed in relation to all areas of the syllabus.

Finally, the two chapters on teacher socialisation and the first five years of teaching provide trainees with an opportunity rare in the book, to directly assess their own situation. The theme of John McArthur's study is the way in which classroom control asserts itself as the primary problem facing most beginning teachers. McArthur traces a steady increase in "custodialism" in the first five years. Interestingly, he finds that both science teachers and male teachers are generally more custodial, and teachers who are the most committed to teaching and those who stay longest in one school are the teachers most likely to develop a less control-based approach.

Peer pressure plays an important part in shaping the beginning teacher, who feels the need to demonstrate to fellow teachers that she/he is 'in control'. Both teachers and students in a school form general expectations about control patterns. Evolution to a less authoritarian pedagogy is difficult for a single teacher to achieve if the school ethos is against it, and can be achieved effectively only by the whole staff, working on a collective basis.

SIMON MARGINSON
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NOTES

1. Commonwealth Schools Commission, Report of the Target Recurrent Resources Standards Study, Canberra, February 1984, Chapters 4 and 5, eg. page 69.

2. R K Browne and L E Foster (editors), Sociology of Education: Australian and New Zealand Studies, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1983.

3. Steve Baron, Dan Finn, Neil Grant, Michael Green and Richard Johnson, Education Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, Unpopular education: Schooling and social democracy since 1944,Hutchinson, London, 1981, pages 84 and 85.

4. ibid, pages 85 and 86.

5. Commonwealth Schools Commission, op cit, page 32.

6. For example see the 1981 and 1982/83 editions of Melbourne Working Papers, University of Melbourne Sociology Research Group.